

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE AS A VIOLATION  
OF THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL NOTION OF TRUTH**

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**Abstract**

*Examination malpractice represents a pervasive challenge that has deeply compromised the integrity of education in Africa, with a particular focus on Nigeria. This persistent issue contributes to the annual emergence of graduates at various educational levels whose certifications are mere facades, misrepresenting the actual knowledge and competencies they possess. Consequently, this leads to a workforce ill-equipped to significantly contribute to the socio-economic development of the continent. Given that truth is a central tenet in African traditional thought systems, often imbued with moral significance, the prevalence of examination malpractice, which is fundamentally rooted in falsehood, starkly contradicts the core values of honesty and truth within African societies. This paper seeks to address the following critical questions: What constitutes examination malpractice? How is truth conceptualized, particularly within the African context? In what ways does examination malpractice contravene the traditional African notion of truth? This study offers a hermeneutic exploration of examination malpractice, the concept of truth, and the traditional African ethos, with a specific emphasis on the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria. The findings indicate that the moral dimension inherent in the African understanding of truth renders examination malpractice a profound violation of societal values. The paper concludes by advocating for heightened awareness of the long-term consequences of examination malpractice in Africa and calls for a re-education and reorientation of the populace on the fundamental moral principles that underpin African society.*

**Keywords:** Education, Examination Malpractice, Truth, African Traditional notion of truth

**Introduction**

Contemporary African society, particularly in Nigeria, is increasingly characterized by a strong emphasis on achieving success, often without corresponding attention to the legitimate methods and ethical avenues required to attain such success (Jimoh, 2009). This mindset has permeated all aspects of Nigerian society, including the education system, which serves as the foundational pillar of any progressive society. One of the most concerning manifestations of this mentality within the education sector is the widespread incidence of examination malpractice.

The core objective of any educational system is to fulfil the transformative goals of education. While there have been debates suggesting that examinations may not fully capture the breadth of a student's knowledge, it is widely recognized that, globally, examinations remain the most effective and objective means of assessing and evaluating learners' achievements after a period of schooling. Therefore, any actions that compromise the integrity of examinations pose a significant threat to the validity and reliability of examination results and by extension, the certifications that are awarded (Jimoh, 2009). The overarching goals of national educational systems, and indeed national development, are severely undermined when examination ethics are not upheld and institutionalized (Nwadiani, 2005).

Regrettably, examination malpractice has become a pervasive issue in Nigeria's education system, persisting for decades and manifesting across all levels of education, even extending

beyond the formal school system. With each examination cycle, new and increasingly sophisticated methods of cheating emerge, exacerbating this deeply troubling phenomenon. The prevalence of examination malpractice in Nigeria poses a serious threat to the credibility of the education system, jeopardizing both the standard of examinations and the value of the certificates awarded. This issue has become such a significant concern that it necessitated the enactment of the Examination Malpractices Act 33 of 1999 to address its widespread impact on society (Akanni & Odojin, 2015). The West African Examinations Council has also maintained annual records of examination malpractice cases, further highlighting the persistence of this problem. The prevalence of examination malpractice has cast doubt on the quality of Nigeria's educational system.

At its core, examination malpractice is rooted in deception, lacking authenticity and integrity. It functions as a smokescreen, presenting falsehoods as though they were truths. Adedokun (2003) emphasizes this fraudulent nature by defining examination malpractice as any misconduct or act that deviates from the established rules and regulations governing examinations, with the intent to achieve favorable results through dishonest means. Akanni & Odojin (2015) categorize examination malpractice into three phases: pre-examination, during the examination, and post-examination. The pre-examination phase involves the procurement of examination questions before the scheduled date of the exam, which is a clear violation of ethical standards. During the examination, malpractice encompasses a range of unethical practices, including copying from another candidate, whether with or without their consent, impersonation, collusion between candidates and invigilators or supervisors, intimidation of invigilators and supervisors, and the substitution of registered candidates' scripts with those completed by hired individuals. Additional forms of malpractice include the unauthorized use of materials within examination halls, such as cell phones, calculators embedded in watches, receivers linked to external transmitters, and external assistance provided by invigilators, supervisors, non-academic staff (such as messengers and office clerks), or hired personnel (Akanni & Odojin, 2015). Post-examination malpractices, on the other hand involve actions such as the alteration of scores by examination council staff, including invigilators and supervisors, where unearned scores are substituted for genuine ones. This results in inflated grades, enabling candidates with these fraudulent scores to gain admission to universities and other institutions of higher learning, where they often perform below expectations (Akanni & Odojin, 2015).

Uwadiae (1997), Anwanbor (2011), and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) (2003) concur that the root cause of this issue is the excessive emphasis on certificates as a prerequisite for employment or academic progression, which drives students to acquire certificates by any means, often leading to examination malpractices. Ubehenin (2002) observed that students, with the assistance of their parents, engage in examination malpractices to secure admission at any cost. Osueze (2007) added that inadequate teacher remuneration leads to disinterest in teaching, which in turn results in poorly taught students resorting to examination malpractice.

Although examination malpractice is neither a recent phenomenon nor unique to Nigeria or Africa (Awanbor, 2005), its persistence in Africa, despite the continent's strong moral traditions, is particularly concerning. In African traditional communities, where truth is deeply embedded in the moral fabric of society, the prevalence of examination malpractice within the education system represents a violation of these core values. Given that examination malpractice is synonymous with dishonesty and falsehood, this paper seeks to establish that its prevalence directly contradicts the traditional African notion of truth.

To explore this issue, the paper poses several critical questions: What constitutes examination malpractice? What is truth? How is truth conceptualized within the African context? And how does examination malpractice conflict with the traditional African notion of truth? Through a method of critical analysis, the paper provides an in-depth examination of the concept of examination malpractice. Focusing primarily on the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria, the paper also explores the concept of truth within the Igbo thought system, distinguishing it from Western notions of truth.

The paper is structured into three major sections: the first part offers a hermeneutic analysis of examination malpractice; the second part examines the concept of truth and the African notion of truth; and the third part critically analyzes how examination malpractice contradicts the traditional African notion of truth. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings.

### **A Hermeneutics of Examination Malpractice**

Examination malpractice is a persistent issue within the educational system, severely undermining its core integrity. This issue has been analyzed from various perspectives by numerous scholars. UNESCO (2001) characterizes examination malpractice as the widespread and unprecedented violation of rules and regulations governing both internal and external examinations, extending from the administration of exams to the marking, grading, release of results, and issuance of certificates. Olanipekun (2003) defines it as the failure to adhere to the conditions established by examination bodies (such as school authorities) for the proper and honest evaluation of students within a given program of study. Therefore, any student who, whether before, during, or after an examination or test, violates the rules and regulations governing its conduct is engaging in examination malpractice.

Onuka and Amusan (2008) describe examination malpractice as any dishonest or unauthorized action undertaken by a student, either independently or in collaboration with others—such as fellow students, guardians, parents, teachers, school administrators, examination officials, supervisors, invigilators, printers, or security officers—before, during, or after an examination, to secure unearned marks or grades. Sonnie (2004, as cited in Igwe et al., 2018) simplifies the definition of examination malpractice as cheating in examinations. Any method employed to achieve success in examinations through unethical or unauthorized means can be classified as malpractice. This encompasses any act of commission or omission by an individual or group intended to pass examinations fraudulently. Thus, anyone who engages in dubious activities to secure better results or grades, in violation of the rules and regulations governing public examinations—whether these are internal or external—can be said to have committed examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice is defined as any intentional act of misconduct that contravenes examination regulations, designed to provide a candidate with an unfair advantage. Commonly referred to as cheating, examination malpractice involves illicit action undertaken by students during examination to secure higher grades through unethical means. It constitutes any irregular or improper conduct in testing candidates, violating the established rules and norms that govern the administration of examinations (Oko & Adie, 2016). Olushola (2006, as cited in Udim et al., 2018) describes examination malpractice as any unlawful behaviour or activity by students intended to gain a personal advantage over their peers who are taking the same examination. Such malpractice can occur before, during, or after the examination, and may be perpetrated by the students themselves or by officials responsible for administering the examination.

From a psychological perspective, Dike (2005, as cited in Udim et al., 2018) characterizes

examination malpractice as any form of cheating that directly or indirectly distorts a student's true abilities. It represents a counter-practice that violates the ethical principles of examinations and constitutes an act of disrespect toward the rules and regulations governing the proper conduct of any examination or evaluation process. At the core of examination malpractice lies dishonesty and deception, as it seeks to create the false impression that a certain level of knowledge or competence exists when it does not. While examinations are intended to assess the presence and degree of knowledge, examination malpractice is an illicit attempt to falsely demonstrate that the knowledge being tested is present, or is of a certain level, when in fact it is not. Therefore, examination malpractice is fundamentally rooted in falsehood, as evidenced by its various manifestations.

### **Forms of Examination Malpractice**

The forms of examination malpractice are virtually limitless, given the continuous emergence of new and increasingly inventive methods. For this paper, we will focus on the forms outlined by Oko and Adie (2016):

1. **Leakage:** This occurs when the content of an examination, or parts of it, is disclosed before the administration of the exam. Leakage typically involves individuals such as staff members of the examination authorities, printers, proofreaders or messengers.
2. **Impersonation:** This involves an unregistered individual taking the place of a registered candidate during an examination. Impersonation often involves collusion between the chief examiner and the examination supervisor and may involve tertiary institution students taking the exam in exchange for monetary compensation or as a favour to a friend.
3. **Smuggling of Unauthorized Materials:** Perhaps the most common form of malpractice, involves introducing unauthorized materials (such as notebooks, textbooks, microchips or pre-written answers) into the examination hall. These materials may be concealed in clothing, such as pants, shoes, hems or bras, or placed in the examination hall before the test. They may also be smuggled in by the candidates themselves or with the help of others during the examination (Onyibe et al., 2015).
4. **Copying:** This form of malpractice involves one candidate copying from another's work, either with or without their consent.
5. **Collusion:** This refers to the unauthorized exchange of information between candidates, typically through the passing of notes or sharing of scripts. Collusion is often facilitated by insufficient spacing between desks and lax supervision. It can also occur when examination officials leak exam materials to intended candidates, parents or school administrators before the exam, leading to widespread cheating.
6. **Marker Malpractice:** This involves the deliberate alteration of a candidate's marks, either to inflate or deflate their original score. This malpractice can be initiated by either examination officials or candidates themselves.

The overview of these forms of examination malpractice reinforces the earlier conclusion that such practices are fundamentally rooted in falsehood. Each form of malpractice attempts to distort reality, constituting a dishonest act that undermines the integrity of the entire educational system. When a system is built on deceit, the knowledge purportedly represented by a certificate often fails to reflect the actual expertise of the certificate holder. This creates a disconnect between the qualifications indicated by the certificate and the true capabilities of the graduate,

leading to a profound misrepresentation of competence. An education system founded on falsehood is incapable of producing graduates equipped to address the challenges of the modern world.

Given that examination malpractice is a deliberate effort to present falsehood as truth, a critical question arises: How did this culture become so deeply ingrained in the Nigerian education system?

### **Origin of Examination malpractice in Nigerian schools**

Examination malpractice is not a recent development in Nigeria. According to Adekale (1993, as cited in Ayannihi & Anya, 2017), the origins of examination malpractice in the country can be traced back to 1914, when the Senior Cambridge Local Examination papers were leaked. This occurred thirty-eight years before the establishment of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). In 1948, a Nigerian candidate had his History examination annulled for bringing a foreign paper into the exam hall, which was related to the examination in question. In 1963, WAEC identified leaks in both the First School Leaving Certificate and the General Certificate of Education/School Certificate Examinations.

Examination malpractice has a long and entrenched history in Nigeria, dating back to the first reported case in 1914 when the Senior Cambridge Local Examination papers were leaked (Akinferon et al., 2016). This issue is not confined to Nigeria alone; it is a global phenomenon, with cases reported in countries such as Pakistan, Japan, India, Great Britain, Kenya, and Malawi (Akaranga & Ongong, 2013; Makaula, 2018).

While examination malpractice has occurred in the past, the current situation in Nigeria is particularly concerning, as the practice is now openly promoted and, in some cases, even celebrated (Ayoada & Farayola, 2020). The Nigerian government has made several attempts to eradicate examination malpractice from the educational system. Notably, in 1984, the federal military government enacted Decree 20 to eliminate examination malpractice across the country. According to Kawugana and Wayopwa (2017), a section of Decree 20 stipulates the following:

Any person who fraudulently or with intent to cheat or secure any unfair advantage to himself or any other person or in abuse of his office produces, sells, buys or otherwise deal with any question paper intended for the examination of persons at any examination or commits any of the offences specified in section 3(27)(c) of this Decree, shall be guilty of an offence and on conviction be sentenced to twenty-one years imprisonment (p. 47).

The Examination Malpractice Act 33 of 1999, a revised version of the earlier Decree 20, established new penalties, including fines ranging from N50,000 to N100,000 or imprisonment for a term of 3 to 4 years, with or without the option of a fine, for those caught engaging in examination malpractice (Ayoada & Farayola, 2020). This Act was introduced in response to the failure of previous administrations to effectively enforce Decree 20 of 1985. Despite these legal measures, examination malpractice has persisted and even intensified, largely due to the lack of consistent enforcement. According to Kawugana & Wayopwa (2017) and Duvie & Eluwa (2016), this ongoing problem can be attributed to several factors, including low moral standards in schools, a lack of confidence among candidates, inadequate preparation, fear of failure, laziness, and the pervasive "419" culture in society.

The prevalence of examination malpractice became particularly widespread in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, coinciding with the military era when the educational sector at all levels suffered a significant decline (Amadi & Opuiyo, 2018). During this period, successive administrations undermined the integrity of the educational system by depriving it of essential funding, mistreating academic staff, and creating a sense of hopelessness among students who

frequently faced disruptions to their studies. As a result, educational institutions were left underfunded and in a state of disrepair, with public schools being reduced to mere learning centres for the underprivileged (Ayoada & Farayola, 2020).

Teachers at all educational levels frequently experienced delays in salary payments, with some owed for several months despite receiving modest remuneration. Industrial action became a common occurrence, and when strikes ended, academic calendars were often disrupted, necessitating rapid transitions to new semesters or academic years depending on the circumstances (Osadebe & Bini, 2018). This disruption made it difficult to predict the year of entry into university, while the year of graduation remained uncertain. Both academic and non-academic staff at universities engaged in frequent strikes, causing students to spend extended periods away from their studies. In primary and secondary schools, where facilities were deteriorating and teachers were poorly compensated, educators often attended school irregularly and frequently left during school hours to pursue other activities to supplement their incomes. Consequently, they struggled to complete the prescribed curriculum within the allotted time frame (Ayoada & Farayola, 2020).

In response to these challenges, the proliferation of private schools became increasingly necessary, leading to their rapid expansion in major cities and towns across Nigeria. This surge in private schools has significantly transformed and complicated the educational landscape. Many private institutions lack standardized admission criteria, allowing individuals from varied backgrounds and levels of preparedness to gain entry, provided they can pay the requisite fees, with the promise of achieving exceptional results in the Senior School Certificate Examinations. Consequently, the focus has shifted from maintaining educational standards to generating revenue, resulting in students from these schools often presenting impressive results with numerous distinctions (Okey & Ewa, 2019). These institutions have become "miracle centres," where success in examinations is marketed as assured. As a result, the private school sector thrives, and the proprietors maintain their prominence by capitalizing on the phenomenon of examination malpractice.

A student becomes particularly susceptible to examination malpractice if introduced to such practices early in their educational journey, finding it increasingly difficult to resist as they advance through their schooling. Private school proprietors often engage in examination malpractice due to fears of widespread failure, which they believe could diminish student enrollment and adversely impact their profit margins (Ayoada & Farayola, 2020). The government's role in this issue is complicated by its political handling of education, which has inadvertently contributed to the rise of private schools in Nigerian towns and cities.

Ironically, while traditional African values emphasize truth, honesty, and integrity, examination malpractice—rooted in deception—has become nearly institutionalized within the same cultural milieu. This contradiction makes it challenging to address the issue of examination malpractice without confronting the inherent cultural paradox.

Therefore, the second section of this paper examines how examination malpractice undermines the traditional African notion of truth. Given the diversity of African cultures and the contextual nature of traditional values, this study will specifically explore the Igbo conception of truth. It will begin by analyzing the concept of truth, relevant theories, the African traditional perspective on truth and ultimately, how examination malpractice conflicts with this traditional notion.

### **Conceptualization of Truth**

Etymologically, the term "truth" is derived from the Latin word "Veritas," which signifies "reality" (Chukwuokolo, 2007). This denotes the actual state or nature of things. The Greek root of truth, "Aletheia," translates to "unhiddenness," "disclosure," "revelation," or "exposure to naked reality." This etymological background suggests that truth is associated with "what is the case" or the state of affairs (Chukwuokolo, 2007). Despite this foundational understanding, truth remains a concept with multiple definitions, leading to various interpretations and theories among philosophers.

The question "What is truth?" has preoccupied human thought throughout history. This issue manifests in various ways in our daily lives, reflecting the complexity of the concept. Philosophers have not reached a consensus on a definitive account of truth (Eje, 2019). However, it is important to differentiate between the use of "true" in statements or propositions and its use in contexts such as "true friend" (Eje, 2019). In essence, to inquire about the nature of truth is to explore what it means to assert that a proposition is true or false. Western Philosophers have traditionally approached this question through multiple theories, each offering a different perspective on the nature of truth (Eje, 2019).

### **Theories of Truth**

Three classical theories of truth are commonly recognized: the traditional correspondence theory, the modern coherence theory and the contemporary pragmatic theory (Mercier, 1984). In addition to these principal theories, other notable theories include the dialectical theory, the redundancy theory, the semantic theory, and the relativistic theory of truth (Eje, 2019). A central challenge with these theories is determining which one best represents the correct or most comprehensive understanding of truth. Consequently, this paper will concentrate on four key theories: correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, and semantic theory.

### **The Traditional Correspondence Theory.**

The correspondence theory of truth is predominantly endorsed by realists and empiricists and is therefore frequently referred to as the realist theory of truth (Mbah et al., 2019). This theory, which is among the oldest and most well-known, posits that truth is determined by the alignment of statements or beliefs with factual reality. Its origins can be traced back to Aristotle, who asserted that a statement is false if it asserts that something that does not exist does or if it denies that something that does exist does not exist; conversely, a statement is true if it accurately reflects the nature of what exists. Consequently, the correspondence theory maintains that truth consists in the congruence between the mind's representations and objective reality (Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1969, cited in Eje, 2019).

For example, if I assert that Obinna is in the classroom, the truth of this statement is contingent upon its alignment with the actual situation—i.e., if Obinna is indeed present in the classroom. Conversely, if Obinna is not in the classroom, then my statement is false. To ascertain the truth of a proposition or belief, it is necessary to compare it with factual reality. Omeregbe (2000, p. 48) succinctly encapsulated this theory by stating, "Truth is the correspondence of the mind with realities; that is if what is in the mind corresponds with what is the case [facts] in reality." However, the correspondence theory is not without its limitations, which prompted the development of the coherence theory by subsequent philosophers.

### **The Modern Coherence Theory**

The coherence theory of truth posits that "a statement is true if there is a coherence between the statement and a systematic body of statements already known to be true" (Omeregbe, 2011, p. 43). According to this perspective, a statement is considered true if it is consistent with, supports,

or reinforces statements that are already established as true. This theory conceptualizes truth as coherence within a particular set of sentences, propositions, or beliefs, where the truth conditions of a proposition are determined by its alignment with other propositions. Beliefs are deemed justified to the extent that they fit coherently within a given system of beliefs. Consequently, a belief is justified if it does not contradict the existing belief system, and its justification improves as it better integrates with the established system of beliefs (Jimoh, 2013).

### **The Recent Pragmatic Theory**

The pragmatist theory of truth asserts that a statement or belief is considered true if and only if "it works," meaning it effectively predicts certain outcomes, enables practical functioning in everyday life and fosters further inquiry or leads to improved living conditions. According to this theory, truth is not absolute but relative, referring to a constantly evolving reality. Statements are not inherently true; rather, their truthfulness is contingent upon their applicability to real-world situations. In pragmatism, the concept of truth is supplanted by that of verification. Thus, an idea is deemed true if it proves to be functional and produces beneficial results; otherwise, it is regarded as false (Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1969, cited in Eje, 2019).

### **The Semantic Theory**

The semantic theory of truth, also known as the Minimalist theory, was developed by Alfred Tarski. This theory posits that truth is a property of sentences rather than judgments. According to Tarski, asserting that something is true is equivalent to asserting a sentence. In other words, the semantic theory maintains that statements about truth operate within a meta-language and are applied to statements in the base language (Tarski, 1944, cited in Eje, 2019). The theory establishes a fundamental condition for any account of truth: for example, Tarski would argue that the statement "All Nigerians are black" is true if and only if the reality corresponds with this assertion, meaning all Nigerians must be black for the statement to be considered true (Eje, 2019).

To fully appreciate the African concept of truth, it is essential to understand it in contrast to Western theories. Having gotten a grasp of the Western Concept, it becomes pertinent to explore the African concept. Kinoti (1999) highlights that, despite Africa's vastness and its diverse languages, beliefs, and customs, there exists a common foundation in cultural and moral assumptions. This suggests that it is possible to make broad generalizations about African notions of truth. Consequently, in this paper, when we refer to the Igbo notion of truth, we are addressing a concept that resonates across many African cultures, reflecting a shared understanding of truth.

### **African Traditional notion of Truth: A Case Study of the Igbo Thought system.**

The concept of truth holds significant importance in Igbo culture. In Igbo, truth is conveyed by the term "Eziokwu". This term is a fusion of two components: "ezi", which denotes correctness, genuineness, rightness, or goodness, and "okwu", which signifies word or speech. Thus, "Eziokwu" literally translates to "good talk," "the correct sentence," "the right word," or "the appropriate statement" (Eje, 2019). More specifically, "eziokwu" refers to the accurate response to a question. As Nze succinctly explains, "the common understanding, (among the Igbo) is that 'eziokwu' - truth is used to represent utterances (that is, the lack of inner contradictions) that are true" (Nze, 1994, p. 4).

In the Igbo thought system, truth is closely associated with several key expressions. For instance, the term "Obughi Eziokwu" translates to "it is not good talk," while "Asi" means "lie" (Eje, 2019). The concept of truth among the Igbo is encapsulated in the term "Eziokwu," which



translates to "good talk." To the Igbo, truth is fundamentally tied to being genuine and authentic. This ontological principle is reflected in the maxim "Eziokwu bu Ndu," which means "Truth is life; life is truth." In Igbo ethical and ontological praxis, truth is more than a moral affirmation; it represents authenticity and vitality. The true is equated with the living, while the untrue is considered to be in a state of non-being or death. As such, to be true is to be alive, dynamic, and self-manifesting, whereas to be untrue is to lapse into the falsehood of non-existence (Eje, 2019). In the Igbo language, the term "Obughi Eziokwu," which translates to "it is not good talk," serves as the antonym of "Eziokwu" (good talk), akin to the concept of falsity in English. In Igbo cognition, "Obughi Eziokwu" is used to denote a statement that fails to align with the truth. However, when there is evidence to suggest that an individual is intentionally deceiving, "Obughi Eziokwu" acquires a moral dimension, transforming into "Asi," which means "lies." At this stage, the statement transitions from merely being incorrect to embodying a moral failing, leading to a questioning of the individual's sincerity (Eje, 2019).

In Igbo thought, truth is understood in nuanced degrees. For example, to describe a statement as "obughi eziokwu" (it is not good talk) is distinct from labeling it as "asi" (lie). The term "asi" implies a serious moral judgement, reflecting negatively on an individual's ethical integrity, whereas "obughi eziokwu" does not carry the same moral weight but indicates that the statement is not accurate. It functions as an intermediate between "eziokwu" (good talk) and "asi" (lies), typically used in a cognitive context unless there is evidence suggesting deliberate deceit (Eje, 2019).

The Igbo people employ various expressions to characterize the nature of truth. For instance, the saying "Eziokwu dika ehihie" (truth is like noonday) underscores the idea that truth is self-evident and immutable, beyond the power of anyone to obscure or alter. Similarly, "Anaghị eli eziokwu n'ala" implies that truth cannot be buried or hidden, and "Ezi okwu dika afo ime, adighi ekpuchi ya aka" suggests that truth, like pregnancy, inevitably reveals itself despite any attempts to conceal it (Eje, 2019). These expressions emphasize the indestructible nature of truth in Igbo thought, although it is also acknowledged that "Eziokwu na'elu ilu," meaning "truth is bitter" (Eje, 2019), reflects the discomfort that truth can bring.

It is important to recognize that many Igbo terms are polysemous, meaning they possess multiple meanings that can only be fully understood within specific contexts. This is also true for the concept of truth in Igbo, which can encompass moral, cognitive, or both dimensions. For instance, when the Igbo refer to something as "obughi eziokwu" (it is not good talk), they do not necessarily categorize it as "asi" (lies) unless there is evidence suggesting that the speaker has intentionally communicated falsehoods (Eje, 2019)

In the Igbo conceptual framework, "obughi eziokwu" represents truth in a purely cognitive sense and is akin to "falsity" in English (Eje, 2019). However, this cognitive interpretation of "obughi eziokwu" can shift to a moral judgment of "asi" if there is reason to believe that the individual is intentionally spreading falsehoods. The interpretation can also vary depending on the recipient of the statement and their understanding of the context in which "obughi eziokwu" is used (Eje, 2019).

In Igbo culture, morality is deeply intertwined with the concept of truth. Historically, this connection was exemplified by the awarding of the "ozo" title only to individuals who were esteemed for their moral integrity and commitment to truth. However, this practice has diminished in many communities today. Despite this shift, the intrinsic link between morality and truth remains a fundamental aspect of Igbo thought. Udefi (2014) aptly notes that "the Igbo

would not refer to “onye asi” (a liar) as knowledgeable, because both knowledge and truth are considered to hold divine and moral significance” (p. 115). The Igbo employ various methods to ascertain the truthfulness of claims or events. According to Udefi (2014):

It is not enough for the Igbo to see how propositions correspond with facts or the weight of superior logic of the argument, but it is important to consider the person's omume (character), that is, his moral standing within the community is paramount. Thus, for the Igbo, truth verification relies more on first-hand experience or what someone experiences or sees with his eyes together with what one apprehends cognitively. In other words, the reliable way of knowing that is regarded as true or *eziokwu* comes more from what one experiences or sees and this is why what the Igbo claims to know is what, in the final analysis, is the case or true (p. 115).

The aforementioned discussion highlights the fundamental role of truth in shaping human relationships, organizational structures, and moral values. This significance is further underscored by the Igbo adage: “Ezi okwu bụ ndụ”—“Truth is life.” In Igbo culture, truth is perceived as synonymous with life itself, thus making adherence to truth a measure of both life and morality. Consequently, for the Igbo, truth and life are intertwined, with only those who uphold truth being considered truly alive. Conversely, individuals who lack truth are deemed to have “no life in them” and are viewed as existing in darkness. The commitment to truth is thus a cornerstone of Igbo philosophy, essential for upholding respect for human life and dignity.

### **A critical analysis of examination malpractice in Nigeria as a violation of African traditional notion of truth.**

Examination malpractice is fundamentally rooted in dishonesty and fraud. It involves presenting something as true when it is not, thereby undermining the integrity of the assessment process. Examinations are designed to gauge an individual's knowledge and understanding on specific subjects, and the results or certificates issued reflect the extent of this knowledge. However, when the examination process is manipulated to produce a desired outcome, it constitutes malpractice.

Malpractice encompasses various forms of cheating, deceit and fraudulent practices employed by students to obtain results, either within or outside the examination hall (Ayanniyi & Anya, 2017). Such practices distort the accurate assessment of an individual's capabilities and knowledge, effectively presenting a false representation of what is genuinely known. When the examination process is compromised to the extent that the certificate issued does not accurately reflect the individual's true level of knowledge, it is tantamount to fraud.

This issue has become pervasive in Nigeria, where examination malpractice now affects all levels of education. The intense competition for certificates and university placements has exacerbated the problem, leading many to resort to dishonest means to achieve results they have not earned. Consequently, examination malpractice has become synonymous with deception. Disturbingly, both parents and educators—who should champion genuine learning—are now often complicit in perpetuating these fraudulent practices, prioritizing the attainment of certificates over the integrity of the educational process.

The transformative role of education underscores its critical importance in shaping individuals and, by extension, society. When the foundational education of individuals is based on deceit, it compromises the integrity of the entire societal framework, akin to contaminating a pure spring. Ironically, in African culture, the responsibility of instilling values of truth and honesty traditionally falls to parents, educators, guardians, and governments. However, the current

reality is that these esteemed institutions are often implicated in undermining these values through examination malpractice.

Examination malpractice, encompassing various forms of cheating that distort the true capabilities of students, represents a breach of ethical standards and a disregard for the regulations governing fair examination practices (Dike, 2005, cited in Udim et al., 2018). Such practices yield results that are inherently false, dishonest, and lacking in authenticity. Given that truth is deeply embedded in the traditional moral and ethical framework of African societies, examination malpractice equates to 'Asi'—deception or falsehood—in the context of examinations. Thus, it fundamentally contradicts and violates this traditional ethos. Eje (2019) further emphasizes this viewpoint, stating:

All traditional societies have a strong moral orientation in their conception of truth. Truth sustains relationships with God, the deities and their fellow men. Truth is paramount in Igbo life, and they believe it is what gives life to any society. Hence, the traditional Igbo society is built on truth and the basis of this is trust which is primarily dependent on the ability of the individual members to tell the truth to one another. It is the basis of their faith in God and the people. Truth is the foundation of any Igbo community (p. 44).

The discussion above underscores the centrality of truth in Igbo culture and, more broadly, in African traditions. Truth is deeply embedded in the moral and cultural fabric of African societies. In the Igbo context, the concept of truth, embodied in the term “eziokwu”, is fundamentally associated with genuineness. Translated, “eziokwu” signifies "good talk" or "genuine talk." Additionally, the Igbo proverb “Eziokwu bu ndu” (Truth is life) poignantly highlights that truth forms the cornerstone of the Igbo community and by extension, of African society.

Given the profound moral orientation towards truth in traditional Nigerian and African communities, it is perplexing to observe the persistence of examination malpractice within their educational systems. The prevalence of examination malpractice, despite the culturally entrenched emphasis on truth, suggests a significant disjunction between societal values and actual practices. As noted by Udefi (2014), “the Igbo would not refer to “onye asi” (a liar) as knowledgeable because both knowledge and truth are regarded as possessing divine and moral status” (Udefi, 2014, p. 115). This observation underscores the inherent contradiction between the traditional reverence for truth and the reality of examination malpractice, which fundamentally undermines the core values of African traditional ethos.

The critical consequence of this contradiction is the jeopardy facing any educational system that tolerates examination malpractice. As the world rapidly evolves into a global village, Africa's education system remains at risk if it continues to be plagued by examination malpractice. Such a trend threatens to produce a generation of youths ill-equipped to address contemporary global challenges, thereby compromising the future of the continent's educational and developmental prospects.

### **Conclusion.**

Examination malpractice and the African traditional concept of truth represent fundamental opposites. In African traditional ethos, where truth is a cornerstone, the coexistence of falsehood, as exemplified by examination malpractice, is inherently contradictory. As articulated in this paper, the African notion of truth, particularly as embodied in the Igbo term “Eziokwu”, is characterized by genuineness and self-evidence. Conversely, examination malpractice is rooted in falsity. This raises the question of how falsity and genuineness can coexist in a society where truth is metaphorically equated with life. In the Igbo worldview, where morality is deeply

intertwined with truth, "the Igbo would not refer to "onye asi" (a liar) as knowledgeable because both knowledge and truth are considered to hold divine and moral significance" (Udefi, 2014, p. 115). This observation reinforces the argument presented in this paper regarding the violation of the traditional value of truth by examination malpractice. Addressing this issue requires a fundamental reorientation to reaffirm the centrality of truth in African life. By fostering a deeper understanding of truth's pivotal role in African culture and its indispensable value for societal integrity, it is possible to cultivate a more robust and ethical educational environment.

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